

[Kings and Pawns: War for Oil](#)

[Parasites Fall Out](#)

[How *Not* to Build Socialism](#)

[Unemployment in China](#)

[Chinese Capitalism - Fact File](#)

[In Defence of the Labour Theory of Value](#)

[New Labour and the Super Rich](#)

[The Materialist Conception of History](#)

[Labour and the Failure of 'Full Employment'](#)

[A Freethinkers Empty Goblet](#)

[After '9-11' - Such a Cynical Silence](#)

[The Failure of Politicians](#)

Socialist Studies No.64, Summer 2007

Kings and Pawns: War for Oil

In recent times monarchs have liked dressing up in military uniforms, inspecting the troops and parading on horse back. Playing at being soldiers dates back to a time shortly after George II, the last king who actually fought for *his* country against the French at the battle of Dettingen in 1743. Usually, the Monarch cheers on wars from the safety of the palace, enjoying a parasitical existence at the expense of the working class. For much of the 19th century it was the expendable sons of the aristocracy who went off to war, with the ranks filled with the desperate and the poor - those whom Wellington described as "*the scum of the Earth*".

Many of the defenders of capitalism's wars - journalists and others - also write their articles from the safety of their newspaper offices. Those journalists supporting the war in Iraq are listed in the concluding chapter of Scott Lucas's THE BETRAYAL OF DISSENT (2004), including what they wrote - a veritable hall of political shame. THE TIMES journalist, David Aaronovitch, for example, refused to go out to experience first-hand the conflict and carnage.

He was one of many of Blair's cheerleaders who fought the war by proxy. Not one journalist cited in Lucas's book was found to be queuing up at military recruitment centres, although they were quite prepared to let other workers do the dying and killing.

Being killed in capitalism's wars is different for the reporters "*embedded*" with the military. Dozens of war correspondents have been killed in the Iraq war, some by "*friendly fire*". Yet, with a few exceptions, their reports are tinged with nationalism about "*our troops*" and the failings of "*our government*", and there is little or no Marxian critique of the war as a result of conflicts over raw resources and strategic points of influence. If the Iraq war had been sanctioned by the UN Security Council and had been "*legal and above board*", it is doubtful that the writings of journalists like Robert Fisk in THE INDEPENDENT would take the critical line they do today.

Unlike the Socialist analysis of the Iraq war which locates capitalism as the cause of the conflict, the capitalist Left have a fragmented and contradictory position. They see US Imperialism as the villain of the piece and give tacit support to Islamic fascism or support to the enemies of British and US capitalism seeing these nationalist groups as "*their friends*", celebrating the body bags and their contents flown back to US and British airports.

Socialists do not take sides in capitalism's wars. We urge workers, no matter where they live, to understand they have a common class interest with workers elsewhere in the world.

A world capitalist class faces a world working class over the control and ownership of the means of production. Workers have no interest in capitalism's wars. Workers should not fight for interests they do not have or for

the means of social wealth production which they do not own.

Leading politicians have little interest in the day-to-day killing taking place in wars they initiate on behalf of the capitalist class, content to snatch photo opportunities with the troops in flying visits to "*boost morale*". George Bush announced that the war in Iraq was over - "*Mission Accomplished!*" - from the safety of an aircraft carrier. The neo-conservatives who pushed for war also stayed out of the battle zones, making secret visits by helicopter to the safety and comfort of secure military bases, rather than having to face the fighting on the streets of Iraq's cities and towns. The desperate and the poor make up the dead and injured military statistics, as road-side bombs and snipers take their toll of soldiers largely drawn from the ocean of poverty found across the United States.

Not all politicians escape the reality of capitalism's wars. On a recent visit to Iraq, mortars exploded around the British Army headquarters, only minutes after Blair had been photographed with soldiers protecting the oil interest of British capitalism.

Blair is insistent that the Iraq war is not for oil but for morality; good versus evil. Blair is ill-read and ignorant of history. Foreign policy is not about ethics but all about protecting, defending and pursuing the interests of the British capitalist class. The pursuit of these interests periodically leads to war. And, historically, oil has been central to British strategic interests, as it is to the US, to China and other capitalist states.

As far back as 17 June 1914, Parliament voted to approve the government's acquisition of a majority stake in the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC), a London-based firm that had recently discovered petroleum in south-western Persia. With this vote, it became British policy to protect APOC's oil concession area in Persia. This made the security of overseas oil supply a major state responsibility which has passed down from one government to the next, irrespective of whether the Party in power is Labour, Tory or Liberal (G Jones, *THE STATE AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE BRITISH OIL INDUSTRY*, 1981, pp 9-31).

Strategically, oil is important not only for capitalist production but also for its killing machine; the armed forces. As M T Klare argued:

With military organizations placing even greater emphasis on the role of airpower and armoured forces, the need for reliable oil supplies became more critical than ever. RESOURCE WARS: THE NEW LANDSCAPE OF GLOBAL CONFLICT, London, 2002, p31

A Precious Prince

Prince Harry is to be spared killing or being killed for the interests of British capitalism. Prince Harry, having been trained to kill as ruthlessly as those he would lead, wanted to go out to the blood-drenched sands of Basra. The politicians and generals did not want to see a PR disaster. The other ranks, useful and expendable pawns, can get killed but not the third in line to the throne.

The media have fallen over themselves to protest at Prince Harry not being allowed to go to Iraq. Instead, he will have to lead the parasitical life of a ruling class playboy, stumbling out from one night club to the next. They forget the old aristocratic adage: "*the first son inherits the estate, the second prays for it, and the third dies for it*". The military might have its own reasons to prevent a member of the ruling class actually dying for his country but, since the First World War, Governments have learnt an important lesson: let the working class do the dying and killing for you.

Those who have been to Harrow, Eton or any major public school will no doubt have visited the Chapel of Remembrance where past pupils have their names recalled for dying for "*King and Country*". The visitor would have noticed the disproportionate number of names listed under those killed in the First World War, compared to those who were killed in the Second World War.

A depleted ruling class and its consequences were recalled in *A NATION IN ARMS: A SOCIAL STUDY OF THE BRITISH ARMY IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR*. by Ian F W Beckett and Keith Simpson. (CONTEMPORARY SCIENTOLOGY, Vol. 16, No. 1, Jan. 1987, pp 135-136). In the First World War, before the introduction of conscription, sons of the ruling class joined up, fought and were killed in their thousands. But it is no good owning

property, wealth and privilege if you cannot pass it on to your children. The ruling class learnt an important lesson. Make sure you protect your sons or at least retain enough at home to reproduce a ruling class. The mistake of letting the children of the aristocracy and business join up in droves, in September 1914, was a mistake not made by the ruling class in the Second World War, where those killing and being killed on the battlefields of the world were mostly from the working class.

So who are the pawns capitalism uses in its current wars? According to the NEW STATESMAN(6 December 2004), the British army looks for many of its teenage recruits "*in deprived areas*"; largely from the industrial wastelands of Northern England and Scotland.

The army runs a web site called "*My camouflage*" which is directed at children as young as 13. The games include shooting at alien spaceships, and these children are encouraged to compete in military themed quizzes.

What these children are not told about is the reality of the killing they will have to do and the brutal de-humanising process necessary to make them killers. According to Amnesty, there have been at least 1,748 "*non-natural deaths*" in UK army barracks since 1990, that is a number exceeding those currently dead from the three wars fought under the New Labour Government.

Another king who fought for his interests was Henry VII. He did not like private armies so he nationalised them. Today, however, capitalist governments cannot get enough of private armies. In the world of free markets, private armies - a.k.a. mercenaries - are big business. There are 44,000 private security contractors in Iraq, and about 21,000 of these mercenaries are workers from Britain lured by high wages-up to \$1000 a day (INDEPENDENT, 30 May 2007). According to War on Want, the use of private armies is a multi-billion dollar business and many of these companies are quoted on the stock market. The British Government has awarded contracts worth £200 million to private armies in Iraq (INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY, 3 June 2007).

The army does have a problem finding its pawns to fight capitalism's wars. Retention of soldiers is poor, with over 14,000 leaving the army in 2006, far outstripping recruitment, leaving the army short of 1,500 soldiers in its ranks (BBC NEWS, 8 August 2006). And at least 1,000 British soldiers have deserted from the army since the beginning of the Iraq war in 2003 (BBC NEWS, 1 June 2006). According to the BBC ONLINE NEWS SERVICE(18 June 2007), more soldiers who fought in the Falklands War have subsequently committed suicide than those who actually died in battle. This is the consequence of capitalism's wars on the minds of the working class who erroneously fight them.

Desperation, naivety or idiotic nationalism may force workers, usually only 16 to 18 years old, into the armed forces but the Socialist question still stands and is still valid. Why should workers fight in capitalism's wars? Why become pawns for another class's interests. The working class have no interest in wars fought for raw materials, spheres of influence and trade routes. The working class have no country and do not own the means of production. Workers do not own the factories, the offices, the machinery, the goods produced, telecommunication and transport systems, and distribution points.

Let the capitalist class fight each other. A more important task is for the working class to cease acting as political pawns in capitalism's wars. Instead the working class should become capitalism's gravediggers, rather than burying their own sons and daughters in conflicts fought in the interests of another class. Workers have their own class interest to pursue,-consciously and politically, and that is to abolish capitalism, the cause of war, and replace the profit system with Socialism.

BLOOD AND OIL

President Carter set out the Carter Doctrine in January 1980 which "*designated the secure flow of Persian Gulf oil*" as a "*vital interest*" of the United States... President Jimmy Carter told Congress that Washington would use "*any means necessary, including military force*", to keep the oil flowing... Carter established the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force... Three years later,...President Ronald Reagan elevated the RDJTF, naming it the Central Command... Centcom's critical role in protecting the nation's and allies' oil supplies finds blunt expression in the testimony its commanders in chief regularly deliver to Congress.

America's vital interests in the Central Region are long standing" General J H Binfield Peay III told a House Sub-Committee in 1997, "with over 65 percent of the world's oil reserves located in the Gulf states of the region - from which the United States imports 20 per cent of its needs; Western Europe, 43 per cent; and Japan, 68 per cent - the international community [sic] must have free and unfettered access to the region's resources". Any disruption in this flow, he warned, "would intensify the volatility of the world oil market [and] precipitate economic calamity for developed and developing nations alike". All Peay's successors have echoed this judgement.

[Quoted from M T Klare, BLOOD AND OIL, 2004, p4]

CAPITALISM DRIVES ONE CRAZY

Mental health problems are having a marked impact in the workplace with increasing numbers of workers forced to take time off work for depression and stress. A study of 30,000 workers by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (INDEPENDENT, 4 June 2007) found that mental ill health is the second largest cause of sick leave after muscle-related problems such as bad backs. Staff suffering from depression took an average of 30 days off.

Moral: This is what capitalism does to the working class. What the working class should do to capitalism is to abolish it, consciously and politically, and replace the profit system with Socialism.

[Back to top](#)

Parasites Fall Out

"Before he left his lucrative and prestigious 'job' as director general of the CBI last year, and more recently accepting graciously a sinecure post in the Brown government, Sir Digby Jones attacked Sir Alan Sugar for his BBC television show, THE APPRENTICE.

Sir Jones: Businessmen do not turn up in a Bentley and scream "You're fired!" at people...It portrays business in a nasty light: prehistoric in its treatment of people and utterly brutal in its pursuit of the bottom line at all costs.

Sir Sugar: I'm the one who is worth £800 million quid, mate... Sir Digby has been a boss of companies where he's not a shareholder and which are so massively large, there's so much arse-protecting within the company... There's two types of businessmen in the world: one like myself, who started with nothing and knows where every screw and nut is in the organisation. And then, the others, who I'm quite jealous of, who get themselves a great reputation and actually do sweet FA, then take a nice payout.

THE INDEPENDENT 21 March 2007

There are a couple of points which can be made regarding this spat between two members of the capitalist class: first, the myth of the 'self-made man' and secondly, whether there is any fundamental difference between an employer who is kind and pleasant to his workers and one who is vindictive and nasty.

The Myth of the 'Self-Made Man

The self-made man was shown by Marx to be a myth. The money capital a businessman receives from the bank or other source to start up his business is dead labour, i.e. past exploitation.

What capitalists need to begin their business is money capital in the form of cash. Economics text books define capital as a thing: -money, plant, buildings, and so on. In fact, capital is a social relationship and can only exist within certain class relations.

In capitalism, workers' labour-power is not only a commodity but in the capitalist production process also becomes capital - *variable capital*. Marx distinguished between *constant capital* (dead labour) and *variable capital* (living labour):

Constant capital is that part of capital which consists of raw material and machinery. Variable capital that part which is exchanged for labour.

SELECTED LETTERS, Marx to Engels, 6 July 1863

Constant capital refers to the raw materials, factories, transport and so on bought by money capital.. This is how Alan Sugar started Amstrad. He did not make the instruments of production. They were made by workers in the past. Instead, he bought them. The amount of constant capital available to the capitalist class expresses the amount of "dead" labour in the system.

The *surplus value* that the capitalist aims for derives from living labour. The capitalist buys labour-power, and the workers produce value greater than the value of their ability to work. The workers add to the value of the raw materials and machines they use a new value greater than the capitalist paid out in wages. Money capital spent on wages does not stay the same: it grows, it changes; it is variable.

Marx was interested in the *rate of profit*, not the amount of profit any one capitalist received. The rate of profit is the ratio of surplus value to constant and variable capital.

That Alan Sugar is an aggressive capitalist, with a barrow-boy skill at making greater profits than his competitors, does not invalidate Marx's analysis on how profit in general depends upon the surplus value created by workers. Nor does the act of cheating invalidate Marx's theory of surplus value. Cheating is, over the capitalist class as a whole, a zero-sum game with some capitalists getting more at the expense of others. The cut and thrust of competition or cheating does not explain the source of profit.

Marx explained the existence of profits in the aggregate. If one capitalist makes a profit at the expense of another capitalist by indulging in sharp practices, one capitalist's gain is another capitalist's loss. In aggregate, circulation cannot explain the existence of profits.

Turn and twist as we may, the fact remains unaltered. If equivalents are exchanged, no surplus value results, and if non-equivalents are exchanged, still no surplus value. Circulation, or the exchange of commodities, begets no value. Marx, CAPITAL VOLUME 1, p 163

The generation of surplus value comes from the exploitation of the working class; from the exploitation of their labour power, i.e. the difference between the value they produce and the value of their labour power.

In order to be able to extract value from the consumption of a commodity, ... [the capitalist] must be so lucky as to find, within the sphere of circulation, in the market, a commodity, whose use- value possesses the peculiar commodity of being a source of value, whose actual consumption, therefore, is itself an embodiment of labour, and consequently a creation of value (ibid., p 167).

Alan Sugar made no social wealth. He did not earn his £600 million. His profits came from the exploitation of the working class. Workers produce more social wealth than they receive in wages and salaries. They are exploited because they do not own the means of production and are forced onto the labour market and into employment. When they are no longer profitable to employ, they are fired. They are fired and made unemployed whether the employer is a "saintly" Digby Jones or a ruthless adventurer like Alan Sugar.

Apparently Sir Alan Sugar is an "ambassador" for the Labour Government to schools up and down the country; an advocate for Gordon Brown's celebration of the capitalist class. In other words, Sugar pollutes the minds of school children on how wonderful it is to be an "entrepreneur" with power to "hire and fire". What he will not tell them, as he stares out from the front of the classroom at these future workers, is that his continued profits will depend on them.

The Reality of Capitalism

What of the behaviour of the capitalist towards the workers he employs? What if the capitalist is a "Saint", weeps at the poor and starving, is a leading philanthropist like Robert Owen and Saltaire, devotes vast sums to charity like Bill Gates of Microsoft, or gives away all his wealth at the end of his life like John Rockefeller: surely - it may be said - it is better for the workers to have a benign employer rather than a mean cold-hearted thug who likes nothing better than

screaming out to an unfortunate worker, "*You're Fired!*" From a Marxian perspective it is not.

No matter whether the capitalist is a barrow-boy made good, or came schooled from Eton and All Souls, Oxford, and knows how to knot his bow tie, to remain a capitalist they must both exploit their employees.

Exploitation does not mean long hours, poor working conditions and low pay. Nor does it relate to the type of capitalist doing the exploiting. Exploitation has a precise scientific meaning. The working class sell their labour power, as a commodity, to the capitalist class. The value of labour power is determined, like that of any other commodity, by the amount of socially necessary labour time required to produce it. The value of labour power relates to a collection or bundle of commodities the worker and their dependents need in order to reproduce themselves as an exploited class.

Workers spend part of their time in work producing for themselves and their family. This is *necessary labour time*. The rest of the time they are working for their employers, "*Saints*" and "*Sinners*" alike. That is the *surplus labour time*, in which the workers are contributing to the total pool of surplus value.

To enjoy surplus value, all capitalists have to exploit. And if they want more profits, they have to increase surplus value through extending and intensifying exploitation. The pressure of competition means that no capitalist can relax. If they do not maintain the productivity of their workforce they might be eased out of their particular market; sales would fall, profits decline, and they would face bankruptcy or takeover.

As far as the working class is concerned, there is only one type of capitalist - an exploiting one. Recognition of their class position and of class exploitation should be enough for workers to take conscious and political action to replace capitalism with Socialism.

However, if the working class, to adopt a colourful phrase by Alan Sugar, continue to do "*FA*" about their servile position and are prepared to remain a class of wage slaves then they will continue to endure the exploitive wages system. Workers will also have to put up with pious exhortations coming from the CBI and the baying crudity of the market traders as they are led to the point of exploitation where, to paraphrase Marx, they can expect nothing but a hiding.

POLITICAL APATHY, THEN AND NOW

This somewhat disillusioned comment is worth noting:

After 60 years of alternating Tory and Labour governments, we have, in comparison with other similar developed countries, the poorest health service, the poorest education and public transport, the lowest minimum wage, the longest working week and the poorest OAP pensions etc. So what have we to thank our governments for? Someone please tell me.

KF, Essex, BBC CEEFAX, 27 June 2007

Back in 1852, Marx noted that in many constituencies the majority of the electorate simply did not vote, and commented:

This is in no wise apathy against politics in general, but against a species of politics, the result of which, for the most part, can only consist in helping the Tories to oust the Whigs, or the Whigs to conquer the Tories.

He pointed out "*the bribery, corruption and intimidation practised in that election*" linked to "*outside pressures*", e.g. on the issue of free trade.

Who repealed the Corn Laws? Assuredly not the voters who had elected a Protectionist Parliament, still less the Protectionist Parliament itself, but only and exclusively the pressure from without. In this pressure from without, in other means of influencing Parliament than by voting, a great portion of electors now believe.

Marx, DISPATCHES FOR THE NEW YORK TRIBUNE, Penguin, p110

Now, our sham Tory-Labour elections mask the real influence of "outside pressures". Remember Bernie Ecclestone? Men with money have easy access.

[NOTE:

This letter was published in the New Scientist, 28 April 2007]

Brian Hicks believes that "*there is no alternative to capitalism*" and thinks - if that's the right word - that "*price and profit signals in a (relatively) free market*" (NS, 31 March) could help achieve sustainability.

Apparently he is unable to see that the inefficient command economies - Soviet Russia, Cuba etc - were/are simply part of the capitalist system.

In every country in the world, most people work for wages/salaries, and goods are traded for money, as commodities. As for the efficiency of capitalism's "*relatively free market*": the pharmaceutical industry has clearly failed to produce innovative new drugs to counter TB and other diseases of the poor, as shown in the COMMENT piece by Angela Saini (NS, 31 March, p20). Also the article about drug-resistant tuberculosis, The White Plague (NS, 24 March, p44), noted that:

... a key goal is to develop new antibiotics effective against TB. The pharmaceutical industry has long neglected the disease, as it has mainly affected the poor

. Which is just what will always happen when "*price and profit signals*" are what determine key decisions about research and investment. "*Price and profit signals*" respond to economic demand - not to our needs, only our ability to pay. The pharmaceutical industry with its vast investment in new treatments for the diseases of the rich and its shameful neglect of the poor is a fine example of the 'efficiency' of capitalism, I don't think.

But we should never accept that "*there is no alternative to capitalism*". Every problem suggests a solution: in this case, that would be a classless society, based on the common ownership of the land and other means of producing and distributing wealth. Production for use, not for profit. And with that - you might call it socialism or communism - we could end poverty and also address the problem of sustainability.

And let's face it, so far, capitalism has not made too much progress in that direction: so isn't it high time we started to look for some alternative to this system which clearly fails people and the planet in so many ways?

[Back to top](#)

How *Not* to Build Socialism

An extraordinary letter was published in THE TIMES(22 March 2007) from a supporter of Chinese capitalism, Jack Shapiro.

We publish the letter below, with our comment which the TIMES chose not to publish. A copy was also sent to the Chinese Embassy, with a challenge to debate their fatuous claim to be Socialist and adherents to the ideas of Marx. The failure by the Chinese Embassy to reply to our letter only goes to demonstrate that dictatorships are not interested in debate only is preventing it from occurring.

Here is Mr Shapiro's letter:

There are no universal blueprints for achieving socialism, neither Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin or Chairman Mao presumed to lay down universal plans. Deng Xiaoping addressed the problem proclaiming the building of socialism with Chinese characteristics. In doing so he said that the first stage would occur over a long period, lasting perhaps a century. He said that the main aim was to make China wealthy, and he also said in doing so there would be an open window to the world through which "flies and other insects" would come. Many of the oddities in China do resemble an economy under control but afflicted with "flies".

Private individual ownership is no Clause Four. As long as the commanding heights of the economy and the political direction of the country are safely in the hands of the Communist Party of China the building of socialism will proceed apace. The next big step is ensuring that rural China achieves the similar wealth of urban China, This will indeed be an "ideological landmark".

Jack Shapiro

Our reply:

There are, of course, no "*universal blue prints*" for Socialism. However, a sound and valid definition of Socialism can be given; namely the common ownership and democratic control of the means of production and distribution by all of society.

This definition of Socialism clearly implies no classes, the abolition of the wages system, free co-operative labour with no wages, buying and selling of commodities, or employers. Production in Socialism would take place to meet human need, not for profit.

The definition of Socialism is important. Principally it severs the bogus connection between on the one hand the Socialists; and Marx and Engels, and on the other hand, the anti-socialists; with Lenin, Stalin and Mao.

Marx and Engels saw Socialism/Communism as a classless society created consciously and politically by the working class. "*From each according to ability, to each according to need*" was a phrase Marx used to describe Socialism. Lenin, and those who followed him, rejected this key Marxian idea, replaced it with a leadership/led politics, and went on to establish a system of class exploitation which retained all the features of capitalism, including wages, trade unions and the class struggle.

You can no more build Socialism with "*Chinese characteristics*" than you could have "*Socialism in one country*". Socialism, like capitalism, will be a world-wide system in which the Earth's resources will be used to meet the needs of human beings, no matter where they live. There will be no nation states. There will be no artificial boundaries preventing the free movement of goods and people.

The characteristics of Socialism will be determined by future Socialists but it will be a Socialism without governments and state violence - two features of capitalism found in China. Socialism would not experience the huge wastage of the productive forces in terms of armament production, something also associated with Chinese capitalism. Environmental pollution, large scale poverty, and thousands of fatal injuries in production, due to the commercial pressures of profit, are also found all over China.

"*Flies and other insects*" refers to the parasites who live off the unearned income of Rent, Interest and Profit. This would include the Chinese ruling class who enjoy access to the best housing, the best facilities, the best food and the best health care. You will not see their sons dying in the coal mines or their daughters having to sell their bodies on the streets of most Chinese cities. State capitalism is just as exploitive as private capitalism.

A command economy is not the same as Socialism. A command economy has been part of capitalism's history either as a result of conflict (First and Second World Wars), to sustain necessary industries indispensable to the capitalist class (Labour's nationalisation programmes after World War II), or as a ruthless means to accumulate capital (Russia in the 1920s and 1930s, and China after 1948). In a command economy the wages system still exists and workers are still exploited. Workers still produce more social wealth than they receive in wages and salaries.

This brings us on to private individual ownership of the means of production, and Clause 4 of the Labour Party. If the Labour Party had ever initiated Clause 4, all that they would have achieved is state capitalism. From the interest of the working class it does not matter whether the employers are individuals, a corporation or the state:-they are employers and, as employers, they exploit labour power, the commodity sold by the working class in exchange for a wage or salary.

And what positive effect does it have for the working class if the "*commanding heights of the economy*" are directed by the Communist Party of China? None at all. A dictatorship can do many things: by controlling propaganda it can call itself what it likes, it can imprison, kill, and shut down its political opponents, trade unions can be "*banned*" and a Socialist Party outlawed.

A dictatorship can do a lot of things - except three. It cannot prevent economic crises. Nor can it put a stop to the class struggle, which exists in Chinese capitalism as it does elsewhere in the world. And more importantly a dictatorship cannot establish Socialism.

A growing private capitalist class will want their own independent representation. They will set-up "*pro-democracy*" groups, court the workers and say they want "*independent*" trade unions. They will need working class support, as did their counterparts in Eastern Europe. Workers in China should note that workers in Eastern Europe remained wage slaves enduring high levels of unemployment and social alienation. Socialists at the time warned workers not to get involved in "*democratic movements*" because these movements had a form of capitalism as their objective not Socialism. We advised workers to look to their own interests and to build-up their own Socialist political parties.

The political objective of the working class, no matter where they live and no matter what conditions they suffer, is to struggle to replace capitalism with Socialism, to replace the private ownership of the means of production with common ownership and democratic control. It is advice we again recommend to workers in China. They have no interest in capitalism; whether it is the capitalism of the US and Europe or the capitalism of India and china.

NOT ANOTHER 'SOCIALIST REVOLUTION'?!

Yet again we have to deplore the BBC's inaccuracy or, rather, lying propaganda. In a news report (BBC WORLD SERVICE, 25 June 2007), the world was told that Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez had decreed the nationalisation of some of his country's significant oil reserves. The BBC described this as a "Socialist revolution".

Correction: Nationalisation means simply state ownership or management. It has nothing to do with Socialism! .

But as Goebbels knew, if you repeat a really big lie often enough, it gets to be believed. And that makes it 'true' - or does it?

[Back to top](#)

Unemployment in China

A primary contradiction of capitalism's failure to meet the needs of the working class is unemployment. When workers are no longer profitable to employ, they are made redundant even though social needs remain, and the raw resources and means of production which could be used to meet those social needs also exist. This failure, which is caused by the relations of production restraining the forces of production, applies equally to Chinese capitalism as it does to other capitalist countries.

There were almost 20 million workers unemployed in Chinese cities in 2002 in addition to 150 million in the rural regions, out of a total workforce of roughly 740 million (BBC NEWS, April 2002). This is a vast waste of productive resources in a country of widespread poverty. The 740 million workforce increases each year as peasants leave the land and gravitate towards the cities. This has created a huge "*industrial reserve army*" of the unemployed, and this has a tendency to drive down wages and to make independent trade union organisation difficult.

Marx commented on the consequences of the industrial reserve army:

Taking them as a whole, the general movements of wages are exclusively regulated by the expansion and contraction of the industrial reserve army, and these again correspond to the periodic changes of the industrial cycle. They are, therefore, not determined by the variations of the absolute number of the working population, but by the varying proportions in which the working-class is divided into active and reserve army.

CAPITAL Vol 1, chap. XXV (3), p.637

Recently 8,000 state-owned companies went bankrupt because their commodities cost more to produce than they could be sold for on the market. According to a recent report, state benefits in China for unemployed workers are minimal. Many of the unemployed sleep rough (BBC NEWS, May 2007).

Exploitation within employment and the social problems associated with unemployment derive from the private ownership of the means of production and the profit motive. Unemployment only exists because property-less

workers are forced into employment. Owning no means of production workers have to find employment and they are only employed if the capitalists can exploit them.

Where there is employment, buying and selling of labour power and unemployment, there is capitalism, no matter what the state happens to call its political regime. Employment and unemployment will only cease when the world's working class will consciously and politically abolish both private and state forms of capitalism.

[Back to top](#)

Chinese Capitalism - Fact File

* Chinese capitalists now feature in the business magazine, FORBES. The magazine identifies, as the richest people in China, two brothers who run the country's largest animal feed producer. They have a combined wealth of more than \$1bn. Significantly; FORBES estimates that fewer than 10% of the wealthiest Chinese are Communist Party members.

* A total of 2,845 coal-mining accidents were recorded in China during 2006, resulting in the death of 4,746 workers, or an average of 13 miners a day (XINHUA NEWS AGENCY, January 2007). Chinese government statistics indicate that just the sulphur dioxide produced from coal combustion poses an immediate threat to the health of people in China, contributing directly to about 400,000 premature deaths a year (DAILY RECKONING, June 2006).

** "Workers habitually face extremely poor conditions including filthy and poorly vented workplaces. Overtime, often unpaid, is frequently compulsory. Factory employees are forbidden from getting married or having children. Workers are often exposed to chemicals without the necessary safeguards. When there are accidents, medicine is often deducted from pay. It has been reported in the south of China, an average of ten workers a day lose a finger or an arm, and one dies every four and a half days."*
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, May 2002

"Heralded by an unprecedented series of walkouts, the first stirrings of unrest have emerged among the millions of youthful migrant workers who supply seemingly inexhaustible cheap labour for the vast expanse of factories in China's booming Pearl River Delta."
WASHINGTON POST, 27 November 2004

* On 14 September 2004, 8000 textile workers went on strike: but this was finally repressed by the State authorities with several workers being imprisoned (CHINA LABOUR BULLETIN, no date, www.clb.org.hk). Workers went on strike against imposed overtime by shoe factory employers (CHINA LABOUR BULLETIN, 30 April 2004). More than 10,000 workers went on strike at the Japanese-invested WalMart supplier in China in a struggle to set up an independent trade union (CHINA LABOUR BULLETIN, 22 April 2005).

These facts and statistics demonstrate that China is capitalist, that the working class in China are exploited within the wages system, and that the class struggle takes place, despite the rhetoric of the Chinese Government.

[Back to top](#)

In Defence of the Labour Theory of Value

At the beginning of the 20th century, a fierce debate took place between supporters of Marx's Labour Theory of Value and the 'marginal utility' school of Jevons, Mengers, Marshall, Clark and Pareto.

Despite not winning the argument against Marx's Labour Theory of Value, the marginal utility school went on to dominate and control the economics departments in universities, particularly the London School of Economics, a Fabian stronghold at the time (the LSE is now a reactionary cabal for free trade and free market economic theory).

Marx's Labour Theory of Value was not taught in the universities, and so generations of economists erroneously believed that their subject matter was a value-free science, rather than a set of ruling class ideas and beliefs. Economists could only study the appearance of capitalism, not its reality. To do so would require the insights given by Marx in CAPITAL which, to economists, was a closed book.

This dominance of neo-classical economics held until Keynes came onto the scene in the 1930s with his publication of THE GENERAL THEORY OF EMPLOYMENT, INTEREST AND MONEY (1936). Unable to give an account of the Depression before the Second World War, neo-classical economics fell into disrepute. However, Keynes' theory of capitalism meant jettisoning any theory of value. Keynes was no Marxist and, apart from some anti-Semitic barbs towards Marx, he wrote off Marx's ideas as having "*no relevance*" for 20th century economics; a remark which was to haunt Keynes' followers some forty years later.

Increasingly the Labour Theory of Value was marginalised, to be advocated only by the Socialist Party of Great Britain who, unlike the supporters of Lenin and Stalin (e.g. Maurice Dobb and Ron Meek of the Communist Party of Great Britain), extended the Labour Theory of Value to cover the system of commodity production, exchange for profit and the wages system in state capitalist Russia.

However, the size of the Party and its limited access to the media meant only a small audience coming into contact with Marx's ideas on the laws governing capitalist production and exchange for profit.

The Key Concept of the Labour Theory of Value

Marx argued that the only practicable basis of measurement of value is the socially necessary labour time required to produce a commodity, and he applied this argument to the workers' commodity, labour power.

On the value of labour power, Marx remarked:

The value of labour-power is determined, as in the case of every other commodity by the labour-time necessary for the production, and consequently also the reproduction, of this special article. So far as it has value, it represents no more than a definite quantity of the average labour of society incorporated in it.

Capital, Vol. 1, chap. VI, pp 170-171

While labour is a human activity associated with production, labour power is the physical and mental capacity to undertake any activity. It is labour power, and not labour itself, which is a commodity under capitalism.

The marginal utility school denied this proposition. They said that all commodities (including a picture by Raphael, or a family bible, or 7 bottles of vintage brandy) could be calculated by means of "*abstract utility*" or the satisfaction their possession gives to the buyer. (NB As we have frequently pointed out, they are mistaken in choosing such examples. These items are not actually commodities, in the Marxian sense: a copy of Raphael's painting being reproducible would indeed be a commodity, but the unique original is not.)

Socialists say that argument from utility is impossible and meaningless. You cannot abstract from the concrete, individual use of commodities to a general utility just as you cannot abstract from individual roses to an abstract "*rose*". An abstract rose has no real content. Likewise with the different uses of commodities: usefulness has no existence apart from the specific physical property of the commodity.

This can be put another way. Say 1gm of gold = 1 kg of bread = 1 kilogram of coal. It is self-evident that the relationship between these different commodities makes no sense in terms of 'abstract utility'. In terms of specific use, what features have gold, bread and coal in common? None whatsoever.

It is precisely because commodities have specific and different use-values that they are exchanged. Use-value in general has no reality.

But it does make sense to say that 1gm of gold = 1 kg of bread or coal because they contain the same number of hours

of socially necessary labour. The relationship " $x \text{ Commodity } A = y \text{ Commodity } B$ " is an objective social fact, and tells us that these two commodities have something in common, labour time.

When commodities are exchanged, their exchange values are quite independent of the subjective assessments that the buyers and sellers have of their respective commodities.

The problem with academic economists is that their mathematical models may be technically sophisticated but the assumptions from which these models are generated are fallacious. In computer terms, *garbage in, garbage out*.

Rational expectation, perfect markets, consumers with all the relevant information at their command to make informed choices, finite resources and infinite demands, Robinson Crusoe individuals, innate behaviour to "*truck, barter and buy*", the "*invisible hand*" of market harmony, self-interest leading to the common good, and so on, render such an economics pure sophistry. The subjective theory of value explains absolutely nothing and is therefore valueless.

Academic economists may have the power to dictate the school syllabus of GCSE and A-level economics, as well as the ability to determine the content of degree courses. However, economists have never given a successful and coherent alternative to Marx's Labour Theory of Value.

Keynes, Neo-Ricardians and Marx

Following Keynes, economists dropped any reference to value. Prices, and supply and demand curves, were the only factors given any consideration in economic analysis. An economist, as Oscar Wilde said of the cynic, "*knows the price of everything and the value of nothing*".

However, wanting only to know the price of something places a severe limitation on attempts to understand economic events. It is like trying to understand the movements of the hour, minute and second hands of a clock without any knowledge of the controlling mechanism behind the clock face. Nothing can be said about the mechanism of the clock, even as to why it periodically stops. As Shakespeare might have said of today's economist: "*I have wasted time and now doth time waste me*". The supporters of Keynes, in the 1970s, could not explain the phenomenon of rising inflation occurring simultaneously with rising unemployment. But Marx's Labour Theory of Value could.

Of course, with the failure of neo-classical and Keynesian economics, Marx with his Labour Theory of Value still remains marginalised, and for a very good reason. He did not write a bosses' economics, but one generated from the interests of the working class and Socialist revolution.

The last thing economics lecturers want to have as they survey the professorial chair is a Marxian albatross hanging around their necks. And as for professors of economics, if they taught Marxian economics positively to students, the doors to government commissions, quangos, and other areas of political patronage filled with the "*great and the good*", would remain permanently closed to them.

Many a would-be radical student has become a reformist on appointment of a lectureship, a liberal by the time they wrote their doctorate, and a reactionary professor at the end of their career. Look hard and long at the professors from the universities who are now advising Cabinet Ministers, and recall what they did when they were young students. In capitalism, being a Socialist carries a price but at least we do not sell our principles for thirty pieces of silver.

If you are paid to defend capitalism, as economists and other academics are paid to do, then the last thing on your mind is to look afresh at Marx's Labour Theory of Value, announce that capitalism can never be made to run in the interests of the working class majority, and urge the working class to become socialists and abolish the wages system. So, following the failure of Keynes, academic economists went back to the earlier, 'classical', economists to see if they could by-pass Marx.

First, there was a revival in the interest of Adam Smith's THE WEALTH OF NATIONS(1776), with the establishment of the Adam Smith Institute in the 1970s. This has its amusing side. The ASI rejects Smith's primitive

theory of value and his argument that taxation is a burden that ultimately falls onto the property owning class.

Systematic thought has never been the strong point of conservatives. Early among the false prophets was Adam Smith who told his readers that the division of labour in a pin factory would multiply output per man by 240 - or perhaps by 4,800. This fairy story is still being reproduced in economics textbooks today as if it were fact. To trace Smith's usefulness, it is worth reading him through Marx's eyes - that is, in CAPITAL as part of a critique of political economy, not its celebration.

Then there was a criticism of the Labour Theory of Value from the so-called neo- Ricardians as part of a much wider concern with the sterility of late 20th century economics. These economists led by Piero Sraffa (THE PRODUCTION OF COMMODITIES BY MEANS OF COMMODITIES, 1960) and Joan Robertson (*The Production Function and the Theory of Capital*, REVIEW OF ECONOMIC STUDIES, 1953-54), returned to the writings of David Ricardo. The problem they were forced to face was Marx's penetrating criticism of Ricardo's THE PRINCIPLES OF POLITICAL ECONOMY AND TAXATION.

However, the neo-Ricardians claimed that a modified Ricardian solution, based upon a theory of inputs and outputs using sophisticated mathematics, could explain capitalism better than the Marxian Labour Theory of Value. That is not so. For a start, they erroneously assumed Marx had made a mistake, in the third volume of CAPITAL, in his transformation of values into prices of production.

That assumption has been shown to be false by many writers including Hilferding (BOHM-BAWERK'S CRITICISM OF MARX, 1904), Boudin (THE THEORETICAL SYSTEM OF KARL MARX, 1907), and G Garchedi (*The logic of prices and values* in THE VALUE DIMENSION, ed. B Fine, 1986). There is no inconsistency in Marx's numerical methods.

Marx had set out both his method and presentation as a whole in the GRUNDRISSE (1857-8), before he even began writing CAPITAL. And few critics of Marx appreciate the unfolding of CAPITAL from the first volume to the third: in the first volume he dealt with a critical analysis of capitalist production; in the second he looked at the process of the circulation of capital; and in the third, he traced the process of capitalist production as a whole. In short, there is a purpose and direction in the way CAPITAL has been presented which is wholly missed by Marx's critics.

Despite Engels having to complete the third volume from a mass of notes, the logical structure of CAPITAL had already been established (see Marx's letter to Engels, April 1868, in SELECTED CORRESPONDENCE, pp 191-195). Questions like the tendency of the falling rate of profit, and the transformation of values into prices of production, were not isolated problems but formed part of Marx's working out of the law of value in the development of the capitalist mode of production.

Second, unlike Ricardo, Marx was able to demonstrate the contradictory nature of the commodity by showing that it had both a use-value and an exchange-value. By applying the Labour Theory of Value to the commodity, labour power, Marx went on to show that abstract-labour produces value in production while concrete labour just produces use-values. He stated this point in a letter to Engels:

The best points in my book [CAPITAL] are: (1) the double character of labour, according to whether it is expressed in use value or exchange value (all understanding of the facts depends upon this, it is emphasised immediately, in the first chapter); (2) the treatment of surplus value independently of its particular forms as profit, interest, ground rent, etc.

SELECTED CORRESPONDENCE, 24 August 1867, p180

Third, the strength of Marx's theory of value is that it allows an analysis of the dynamic, albeit contradictory, process of capitalist production and exchange to be grasped as a historical movement in which the class struggle is the generator of the whole system. The theory also gives important insights into the accumulation and centralisation of capital as a historical feature of its movement. Other benefits of the theory are its explanation of productivity, inflation, taxation, banking, money, and why capitalists introduce machinery at the cost of labour.

Finally, the Labour Theory of Value explains why crises have to occur periodically, the anarchic nature of the trade cycle, and why the class relations of capitalism prevent the forces of production from developing to their full extent.

Marx's Labour Theory of Value, informed by the materialist conception of history (Marx's "*guiding thread*" to his studies) and the political concept of class, class interests and the class struggle, still remains coherent, sound and valid. The theory's explanatory power will only end with the establishment of Socialism: that is, the theory is specific only to a social system based upon commodity production and exchange for profit.

THE CAPITALIST PRODUCTION PROCESS

Capitalist production... reproduces the separation between labour-power and the means of labour. It thereby reproduces and perpetuates the condition for exploiting the labourer. It incessantly forces him to sell his labour-power in order to live, and enables the capitalist to purchase labour-power in order that he may enrich himself. It is no longer a mere accident, that capitalist and labourer confront each other in the market as buyer and seller, It is the process itself that incessantly hurls back the labourer on to the market as a vendor of his labour-power, and that incessantly converts his own product into a means by which another man can purchase him. In reality, the labourer belongs to capital before he has sold himself to capital. His economic bondage is both brought about and concealed by the periodic sale of himself, by his change of masters, and by the oscillations in the market-price of labour-power.

Capitalist production, therefore, under its aspect of a continuous connected process, of a process of reproduction, produces not only commodities, not only surplus-value, but it also produces and reproduces the capitalist relation; on the one side the capitalist, on the other the wage-labourer.

Marx, Capital Volume I, chap. XXIII

[Back to top](#)

New Labour and the Super Rich

"Labour is the party of fair taxation": or so said New Labour's 1997 Pocket Policy Guide (NEW LABOUR LEADING BRITAIN INTO THE FUTURE, p12). Ten years later, that New Labour *"future"* is now. So what happened to their *"policies for the many, not the few"*?

Along with supersize City bonuses, the multi-millionaires of Tory times have been replaced by international billionaires, attracted by London as a tax-haven, with Brown's ideas of *"fair taxation"* meaning special favours. Even the capitalist press is concerned about the growth of *"the super-rich"*. In a special issue of the FT MAGAZINE (editorial, 13 November 2004, p5), they warned that: *"very wealthy people are acquiring a larger purchase on our political and public life."* For Martin Wolf, the FINANCIAL TIMES'S chief economics commentator, this can pose a political problem: *"the market economy requires a state that is not owned by those who prosper in the market"*. *In countries where political parties are weak and electioneering expensive, wealth can buy power. As the power of wealth in politics rises, republics can turn into plutocracies and, ultimately, into tyrannies... In the US, too, wealth brings office...*

Yet purchase by the wealthy of the state... brings dangers. The market economy requires a state that is not owned by those who prosper in the market. That way lies corruption, rampant special interest legislation and distortions of competition. In the long run, there may also lie loss of democratic legitimacy, as the purchase of power subverts the ideal of shared citizenship in the republic.

ibid., 'GOLDEN RULERS', pp 12-13

Capitalism has a real need for that fig-leaf of 'democratic' respectability. We are not told the truth - that behind this veneer of 'democracy' is a class interest. The state is not neutral: it serves the interests of the capitalist class, against the workers. This helps explain how it is that in the last decade:

It's the super-rich who have done best under Labour.. The Office for National Statistics reports that this group of 600,000 people doubled its wealth to £797bn in Labour's first six years. The share of national wealth taken by these super-rich has grown from 20 to 23 per cent, while the share of the poorest 50 per cent shrank from 10 per cent in 1986 to 5 per cent in 2002.

Socialists declare as our aim the achievement of Socialism. More than a century ago, the founders of the SPGB declared that "the emancipation of the working class" would mean "the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic". A plutocracy is a system in which the privileged rich operate the levers of power, sometimes more or less openly, more often rather more covertly. That is quite a normal feature of capitalism.

MAKING CAPITALISM AND POVERTY HISTORY

Paul Vallely and his chums in Live Aid cannot understand why their efforts to persuade governments to end poverty have fallen on deaf ears:

The stench of a great political betrayal is in the air. Two years ago the leaders of the rich world stood before the cameras and signed a solemn pledge to double aid to the poorest people by 2010. It has not happened. Indeed last year global aid fell. It is set to fall again this year .

THE INDEPENDENT, 16 April 2007

The first mistake made by the organisers of Live Aid is not to recognise the social system in which poverty takes place. We live in capitalism where the means of production are owned by a minority capitalist class to the exclusion of the majority. The working class are forced to work for a wage, are exploited, and those who do not have access to an income merely starve and die. Under capitalism production takes place for profit, not to meet human needs. Potentially, there could be enough to feed, clothe and provide medical care for the world's population but the profit motive gets in the way.

The second mistake is for the organisers to believe that politicians and governments exist to further the interests of all society. This is extreme naivety. Politicians and governments exist to serve the interest of the capitalist class. The function of governments is not to end poverty but to ensure the capitalist class enjoy a life of privilege and wealth. Aid, when it occurs, comes with strings attached; either political or economic strings, whether serving the interests of the capitalist class as a whole with respect to trading routes and raw resources or the interests of specific capitalist groups selling commodities abroad.

The third mistake is to offer promises which never can be met. For the best part of three decades, Live Aid has been selling the lie that social reforms can work and that capitalism can be tamed to behave in a way that it cannot. Social reforms cannot get rid of poverty, and capitalism can only be made to work in the interests of the capitalist class.

And the fourth mistake is not to question capitalism. To do that would be the beginning of a conscious political process to *make poverty history*.

Capitalism has to be recognised as being the cause of the problem. Capitalism has to be replaced with Socialism where human needs will be met. Live Aid cannot do this. They are locked in the politics of reform. How many millions will have to die before these mistakes are learnt?

[Back to top](#)

The Materialist Conception of History

The case for Socialism, as argued by the Socialist Parry of Great Britain from its foundation in 1904, rests firmly and squarely on principles derived from Marx, especially from his argument that what leads to historic change is the class struggle, and that "*every class struggle is a political struggle*" (THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO).

It is really stating the obvious to say that Marx was a revolutionary. Although the social revolution he worked for has not yet been achieved, he did succeed in another revolution: he revolutionised the way we look at history. Ever since

his time, few serious historians have not been influenced by his emphasis on the importance of economic and social conditions. His thinking has also influenced archaeologists, biographers, art historians, and many others.

For instance, Patrick Gardiner, an American professor of philosophy, though clearly no admirer of Marx, acknowledged somewhat grudgingly Marx's huge influence.

By stressing the relevance to historical explanation of technical and economic factors in the particular way he did, Marx in effect redrew the map of history. In doing so he made it difficult for historians ever to look at their subject in quite the same fashion as they had done before; this is surely the mark of a considerable and original thinker.

Frank Gardiner, THEORIES OF HISTORY, 1959, p125

Among 20th century British historians, who were clearly influenced by Marx's theory of history though not themselves Socialists, were A L Rowse and G M Trevelyan (author of ENGLISH SOCIAL HISTORY, 1942). Another historian who is little known today was Pirenne, who studied the emergence of capitalism from medieval developments in trading and production. Also, E H Carr who argued that:

The more sociological history becomes, and the more historical sociology becomes, the better for both.

WHAT IS HISTORY? (1961)

A number of other historians were of the Left, and all too often Leninist / Stalinist: e.g. E P Thompson (THE MAKING OF THE ENGLISH WORKING CLASS), Eric Hobsbawm, Christopher Hill, and many others. The Communist Party influence led to many of these trying to fit their histories into a dogmatic, doctrinaire, orthodox straitjacket. If an account did not tally with what Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin had said, the writer was anathematised.

In response, other historians took up positions opposing this approach. Alfred Cobban (THE SOCIAL INTERPRETATION OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION, 1964) took issue with the way Leftwing historians rode roughshod over the French Revolution, trying to twist the facts to fit their theory and preconceptions, hence their obsession with the *sans culottes* in the French Revolution. Cobban quoted E H Carr who saw that these Leftwing historians were following, not Marx's theory of history, but Lenin's vanguard theory of political revolution.

Obviously *every* historian, anyone who comments on history, has a certain perspective on history. Everyone selects certain points as important, and sees others as less significant.

The Great Man in History

A common but naive view is that history is made by the actions of 'Great Men'. For instance, in Central London, there are plenty of statues as visual reminders - most recently, an outsize bronze figure of Margaret Thatcher, towering over MPs in the Lobby of the House of Commons. Nelson's column in Trafalgar Square is another reminder.

One who held this view of history was the 18th century conservative politician, Edmund Burke, who wrote that "*great men are the guide-posts and landmarks in the state.*" However the 'Great Man' view was very ably answered by Plekhanov in his booklet, THE ROLE OF THE INDIVIDUAL IN HISTORY. He argued for instance that, whatever Napoleon's abilities, unless the historic conditions of his time allowed it, Napoleon could not have become a war-leader, and later Emperor.

The so-called 'Great Man' theory is always open to the "*What If*" argument. Take Hitler and Churchill for instance: *if* Hitler had been killed in World War I or *if* Churchill had died in the Boer War, though some details of World War II might have been different, in general the outcome would probably have been very much the same, since no individual is irreplaceable.

Wilberforce is credited with having put an end to the slave trade. But what if Wilberforce had not taken up the cause of those, like Tom Clarkson, who were already campaigning for the abolition of the slave trade? Contrary to the myth, Wilberforce did not initiate the campaign, nor could he have got his Bill passed without the aid of a strong campaign waged by Clarkson and many others, not to mention the numerous slave revolts which made the slave trade less and less profitable. But the Wilberforce myth is a convenient one: Wilberforce was an evangelical Christian, and his son,

Soapy Sam, later became a Bishop. Melvin Bragg concluded, in his superficial discussion of Wilberforce (BBC RADIO 4), that the case of Wilberforce would justify resurrecting the "*so-called Great Man Theory of History*".

Yet the law to abolish the slave trade was not passed till after Wilberforce's death, and not implemented till some time later, while slave trading in the British Empire actually went on at least till the late 1920s.

The great man theory runs up against the need we have to *explain* historical events. If the 'great man' Wilberforce is to be applauded for having achieved the abolition of the slave trade, one has to ask: why just *then*? Why not earlier? The 'great man' theory has no answer to this.

After Lenin's death in 1924, the claim was made by the Independent Labour Party that Lenin was a great leader, a man whose "*naked will*" had "*changed the course of history*". Not so, as the SPGB replied:

Despite his claims at the beginning, he was the first to see the trend of conditions and adapt himself to these conditions. So far was he from "changing the course of history"... that it was the course of history which changed him, drove him from one point after another till to-day Russia stands halfway on the road to capitalism.

SOCIALIST STANDARD, March 1924, reprinted in RUSSIA SINCE 1917, SPGB pamphlet, 1947, p35

Lenin, far from changing history, was in fact driven by the constraints and conditions of the time and, due to the lack of large-scale industry in the towns and the peasants' opposition in the countryside, found himself forced to adopt state capitalism and the New Economic Policy .

Lenin was seen by our party, the SPGB, not as a great man, a giant of the times, but rather as simply one who adapted quicker to the conditions than others. Far from him changing the course of history, it was the course of history that changed him.

God's Part in History

An older belief was that everything that happened was a reflection of the Divine Will or Providence. You find this in the Bible - Old and New Testaments, also in Islam. You find it throughout the Middle Ages. For instance, Gutenberg, the 15th century German inventor of the process of printing with movable type, saw his invention as God's work:

With the help of the Most High at whose will the tongues of infants become eloquent and who often reveals to the most lowly what he hides from the wise, this noble book CATHOLICON has been printed and accomplished without the help of reed, stylus or pen but by the wondrous agreement, proportion and harmony of punches and types...

S H Steinberg, FIVE HUNDRED YEARS OF PRINTING, Pelican, 1955, p23

This belief remained the accepted view till about the end of the 18th century, and can be found in some politicians' speeches even today.

For Hegel, writing in the early 19th century, history was simply the working out of God's divine plan.

God governs the world; the actual working of his government - the carrying out of his plan - is the history of the world.

Hegel, Introduction to the Philosophy of History, see Basic Problems of Philosophy, US, 1955, p188

"The Laws of the Mind"

That view became superseded in 19th century Britain by a more secular notion of 'Progress' or the growth of civilisation, exemplified in growing industrial technology, the rapid growth of vast cities, and the expansion of the Empire. In Macaulay's HISTORY OF ENGLAND- described by Asa Briggs as "*the most important and influential English history book of the 19th century*" (THE AGE OF IMPROVEMENT, p2) - Macaulay wrote:

... the history of our country during the last hundred and sixty years is eminently the history of physical, of moral, and of intellectual improvement.

Another influential 19th century historian, Buckle, echoing John Stuart Mill, also held that historic progress was

dependent on intellectual developments:

[We have] resolved the study of the dynamics of society into the study of the laws of the mind...

Gardiner, op. cit., p128

Then there were some who became totally confused and gave up on any attempt to make any sense of history. Lytton Strachey, writing ironically of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, suggested that it was simply *chance* which decided how things turn out:

The English Constitution... is the child of wisdom and chance... The wisdom of Lord Grey set it upon the path of Democracy. Then chance intervened once more; a female Sovereign happened to marry an able and pertinacious man... But what chance gave, chance took away. The Consort perished in his prime; and the English Constitution, dropping the dead limb with hardly a tremor, continued its mysterious life as if he had never been.

Queen Victoria, THE OXFORD BOOK OF ENGLISH PROSE, p1055

And finally there have been and still are those who claim that history is simply down to the power of great ideas. This idea is echoed in talk today of the 'clash of civilisations' - though some would say this is simply the old notion of the will of God, Divine Providence, etc.

Early in the 20th century, Lord Acton wrote that "*ideas... are not the effect but the cause of public events*". R H Tawney, a Catholic and a Fabian, had the same view:

... the children of the mind are like the children of the body. Once born, they grow by a law of their own making.

[quoted by A L Rowse, ON HISTORY, 1927]

Neither of these opinions are of much use. Neither Acton nor Tawney gave an explanation of where ideas come from, or how and why they change, or why some ideas take root while others are soon forgotten or bypassed. As for the 'clash of civilisations', that is a mere slogan which explains nothing.

The Materialist Conception of History

Against these, we have Marx's revolutionary and very influential theory - the materialist conception of history. At one level, as Marx himself pointed out, the materialist conception of history is simply commonsense.

Does it require deep intuition to comprehend that man's ideas, views, and conceptions, in one word, man's consciousness, changes with every change in the conditions of his material existence, in his social relations and in his social life?

THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO

Building on this materialist perspective, Marx developed a theory of history, summed up in his carefully worded 1859 PREFACE to the CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL ECONOMY (pp 20-21)::

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness...

Earlier, in 1849, Marx had argued that the superstructure, including the legal system, has a functional relationship with the material base, the mode of production, because it expresses the social needs of that system.

Society is not founded upon the law; this is a legal fiction. On the contrary, the law must be founded upon society, it must express the common interests and needs of society - as distinct from the caprice of individuals - which arise from the material mode of production prevailing at the given time.

Quoted in G A Cohen, KARL MARX'S THEORY OF HISTORY, p232

To many of Marx's critics, the idea that human history - people's actions - can be in any way seen as '*determined*' is anathema.

Marx has been misrepresented as a dogmatic fatalist. True, he did argue in the COMMUNIST MANIFESTO, that Socialism is inevitable. But against this there are many writings where he made it clear that historical determinism does not rule out action.

On the contrary - for instance, in The 18th BRUMAIRE OF LOUIS BONAPARTE, he wrote that " *Men make their own history.*" But, he continued, they cannot do this absolutely freely, without any constraints:

Men make their own history but not just as they please. They do not choose the circumstances for themselves, but have to work upon circumstances as they find them, have to fashion the material handed down by the past.

And Engels, in answer to a supporter's question, replied:

Political, juridical, philosophical, religious, literary, artistic, etc., development is based on economic development. But all these react upon one another and also upon the economic base. It is not that the economic position is the cause and alone active, while everything else only has a passive effect. There is, rather, interaction on the basis of the economic necessity, which ultimately always asserts itself...

Letter to Starkenburg, 1894, SELECTED CORRESPONDENCE, pp 517-8

To those who choose to see Marx simply as a determinist, with no room in his theory for individual action, determinism means simply a one-way causality. But that is the straw Marx, Marx the economic determinist, often put up as an Aunt Sally, a soft target to attack. For instance, Lewis S Feuer was an academic who deplored Marx's habit of writing at times as a prophet:

Marx's prophetic will dictated his prophetic intuition; he saw one sociological causal line as the inexorable law of history.

Introduction, MARX AND ENGELS, BASIC WRITINGS ON POLITICS AND PHILOSOPHY, Fontana, p16

How far are these fair objections? Did Marx actually argue that Socialism / Communism would *inevitably* succeed capitalism? If so, why do anything to further the cause? Why not just sit back and wait? We should recall Marx's brief statement drafted in 1864 for the First International, the PREAMBLE to the PROVISIONAL RULES (ratified in 1866):-

Considering, That the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves; ... That the economical emancipation of the working classes is ... the great end to which every political movement ought to be subordinate as a means; That all efforts aiming at that great end have hitherto failed from the want of solidarity between the manifold divisions of labour in each country, and from the absence of a fraternal bond of union between the working classes of different countries; That the present revival of the working classes in the most industrious countries of Europe, while it raises a new hope, gives solemn warning against a relapse into the old errors and calls for the immediate combination of the still disconnected movements.

MARX, THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL AND AFTER, Penguin, p82

Feuer and others of this school seem to forget the point made in the second sentence of the COMMUNIST MANIFESTO, where Marx and Engels wrote:

Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guildmaster and journeyman, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open, fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.

The man who wrote that these class struggles "*each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes*" was definitely not a man who was blithely counting on success as the only possible outcome.

To both Marx and Engels, failure was a real possibility: Socialism was not inevitable or predetermined. That remains the position for us today. Socialism is possible but to achieve it requires certain preconditions, above all class-conscious, democratic, political organisation by the working class, not just in Britain but in many other states.

The founders of the SPGB clearly had these points in mind in drafting our own DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES, and actively and energetically working to build a united, principled, class-conscious Socialist Party, working for

Socialism and nothing but Socialism. Like Marx and Engels, we too must warn workers to avoid the "*old errors*" of opportunist reformism and divisive nationalism, as well as other mistakes, like Leninist vanguardism, and the mistaken idea that state planning or nationalisation can serve as a transition between capitalism and socialism, a stage on the way to the abolition of the wages system and class exploitation.

Marx held that the property relations of capitalism would become fetters holding back further development of the forces of production. Today this is very clear, not just from the recurrence of crises and the continuance of mass unemployment, but also from new fears about climate change, fuelled as it is by unrestrained capitalist expansion and competitive growth.

The case for Socialism is as clear today as it has ever been, the need for Socialism is now more urgent than ever.

Talented people can... change only individual features of events, not their general trend; they are themselves the product of this trend; were it not for that trend they would never have crossed the threshold that divides the potential from the real.

Plekhanov, The Role of the Individual in History, p53

[Back to top](#)

Labour and the Failure of 'Full Employment'

Labour has always left political power with unemployment higher than when they first went into power. Their claim to be the party of full employment has never materialised and capitalism has gone its own way.

When Mr Blair came to power in 1997, just over 2 million workers were unemployed. The Labour Government spent millions of pounds seeking to cut dole queues, with programmes such as the New Deal for the young unemployed. But in recent months, according to the BBC NEWS (7 June 2007), the rate of unemployment has been rising again and currently stands at 1.7 million (Office for National Statistics). The ONS uses the widely recognised International Labour Organisation (ILO) counting system.

Although the way unemployment is measured has changed over the years, both the ILO measure, which counts the number of people seeking work, and the claimant count are roughly the same as they were in 1979. In percentage terms it is slightly higher at 5.5% (1.7 million workers unemployed) compared with 4.75% in 1979 (1.4 million workers unemployed). Of course, the Labour Government cannot get rid of unemployment any more than the Tories or Liberal Democrats can.

It is left to Marx to show that unemployment is a consequence of capitalism and will remain a social problem so long as capitalism is given support by a non-socialist working class:

... capitalist production moves through certain periodical cycles. It moves through a state of quiescence, growing animation, prosperity, overtrade, crisis and stagnation.

WAGES, PRICES AND PROFIT IN MARX, Selected Works Volume 1, p 440

ARMIES FOR HIRE

In the War on Want pamphlet CORPORATE MERCENARIES: THE THREAT OF PRIVATE MILITARY AND SECURITY COMPANIES (November 2006, p 16), the writers tell us that:

"The profit motive behind all corporate adventures means that... PMSCs [i.e. mercenaries] have an inherent interest in ongoing conflict and the social tensions that lie behind it".

Iraq, it seems, is the first conflict fought using PMSCs "*on a major scale*". One company, Aegis, saw its turnover rise from £554,000 (2003) to £62m (2005) - 75% of their turnover came from work in Iraq (p4).

[Back to top](#)

A Freethinkers Empty Goblet

[Back to top](#)

How socialism became a poisoned chalice for freethinkers, an article by Daniel Balaam, was published in HE FREETHINKER (May 2007). The corruption, double-dealing, opportunism and vote-catching scheming, described in this in some detail, expose not only how rotten modern capitalism is but also how very little the writer, Mr Balaam, himself understands of what he rattles on about and how much he is himself part of a disease, being void of any solution.

There is nothing new in capitalist politicians like George Galloway and Ken Livingstone buttering-up to minority religions if there are votes to be gained. Both Tory and Labour parties have paraded their "*Green*" credentials, and the Greens themselves show willingness to share power with other capitalist parties when they have failed to gain a majority. Likewise, the SNP having made Scottish independence their main plank and failed to gain a working majority, instead of seeking fresh elections, have curried support from whoever might help them keep power. The Labour and Liberal parties have been doing deals for more than a century.

Capitalism without religion is a freethinker's pipe dream. If Mr Balaam had made the effort to understand Marx instead of just trying to score cheap points, he would know that historical materialism is not just atheism attached to Socialism but a comprehensive view of history, society and the machinations of class conflict.

Marx's *Preface* to THE CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL ECONOMY makes clear that ruling classes, including the capitalists, have always found religion indispensable for keeping workers docile while being exploited.

Only the growth of Socialist understanding about the need to end capitalism and establish world-Socialism will rid society of this cultivated ignorance which is religion.

In the seemingly bottomless pit of ignorance from which Mr Balaam produces his 'articles', he is able to generate such mindless rubbish as:

Having invented etymologically dubious terms like "Islamicphobia" to proscribe criticism of militant Islam, deluded socialists [sic] believe they can harness this disaffected and angry religion to breathe new life into their obsolete Marxist agendas.

Evidently, Mr Balaam blindly drifts along with the commonly accepted distortions of 'Socialism' and what constitutes being a Socialist, as popularised by the bourgeois media.

Thus any slogan-shouting, reform-minded leftist who demands re-nationalisation of the railways, and supports wars on the side of those against America and Britain, should qualify.

The reality is something very different. A Socialist is someone whose one aim and political purpose, is the attainment of Socialism. This does not mean state-run capitalism, but a world-wide system of commonly owned means of production, a classless society with no market / money economy and no wages system. Under Socialism, as the word implies, the food, clothing, shelter, and other general amenities needed by society will be produced to be used freely, according to need, not according to one's ability to pay as is the case in capitalism.

The only thing Socialists can seek to "*harness*" is the effort to spread Socialist knowledge for the single purpose of establishing Socialism. All religion, whether "*disaffected and angry*" or otherwise, has always been an anti-knowledge stumbling-block in the path of Socialism. As to "*obsolete Marxist agendas*", Mr Balaam reveals the same lack of understanding of these, as do the leftist agents of confusion he claims to be hostile to.

Marx and Engels argued from the evidence of history:

Of all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today, the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class... ... All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interest of minorities. The

proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority... .. Political power, properly so-called, is merely the organised power of one class for oppressing another. If the proletariat during its contest with the bourgeoisie is compelled by force of circumstances to organise itself as a class, if, by means of revolution, it makes itself a ruling class, and, as such, sweeps away by force the old conditions of production, then it will, along with these conditions, have swept away the conditions for the existence of class antagonisms, and of classes generally, and will thereby have abolished its own supremacy as a class.

THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO

The Marxist agenda is very clear: it calls for the abolition of classes and therefore of class society. Does Diesel Balaam really believe, when he looks back at the Soviet Union, that this is what happened there? Or, when he listens to the deranged babblings of the leftists, does he delude himself that this is what they stand for?

Mr Balaam even has the effrontery to claim that he "*almost joined The Socialist Party of Great Britain*". He does not know that you must first understand Socialism to be able to do that.

In the same passage, in his profound ignorance he says:
However well-intentioned, Socialism always seems to go drastically wrong whenever it is put into practice.

Since Socialism means the world-wide abolition of markets and the wages system, so that the goods and services we all need would be abundant and freely available, it clearly has yet to be put in practice. In any case, Mr Balaam affirms his preference for capitalism which, with unintended humour, he tells us has "*an independent judiciary and free press*".

There is no chalice more poisoned than that of nationalism, and Mr Balaam is far from losing his. He talks of "*our forces*" defending Muslims in Bosnia and writes naively of:
[the] British tradition of fairness, openness, social responsibility and mutual reciprocity between citizens with a shared sense of national identity and pride.

What bunk! He has yet to catch up with the crime figures, and the growing concentration of wealth in the hands of the capitalist class from the exploitation of wage-labour. Incidentally, "*reciprocity*" means mutuality - but we do not notice the capitalists being keen to share and share alike with the workers.

Finally, it must be asked just what "*freethinking*" is supposed to mean. Since mankind lives and has always lived in society, what we think about is generated by social relations and conditions. Under capitalism this includes nationalism and religion, war and poverty, plus the passing parade of news headlines and popularised personalities. We can, of course, read about history but this also relates what men and women have done to the social conditions of the past.

So, if the raw material of thinking comes from society, today we can either be passive and think of capitalist nationalism, or we can be revolutionary and think about and organise for a classless society of common-ownership and production, for free use instead of for profits.

That workers are resistant to Socialist ideas is because their thinking is the product of bourgeois brain-washing. That there is conditioning and indoctrination from the womb to the tomb demonstrates how seriously the ruling class takes what its wage slaves think about.

Workers are taught to believe that war is a natural human condition and that "their" side is always right. They are taught that poverty is the result of laziness and is mainly suffered by the work-shy.

Clearly, Mr Balaam's article shows he needs to be very wary of conditioning.

[Back to top](#)

After '9-11' - Such a Cynical Silence

After '9/11', we had many pages in the prostitute press, much hot air on the telly and radio, endless reports of the horrors and heroism following the attacks on New York's Twin Towers. George Bush and Tony Blair made political capital from this horrific event. Bush and Mayor Rudy Giuliani exploited it to the maximum, each using the event and its aftermath to boost his own political prestige, weeping crocodile tears as they praised the heroism of the rescue workers, the firemen and others from all over the States, who dug bodies out of the rubble, working for months to make the site safe. Later the New York firemen, having dared to strike for better pay, were castigated for their "*greed*." So what price heroism?

Since then, not much has been said of the way these workers, and New Yorkers generally, were misled and lied to about the very serious environmental hazards and health risks they all faced.

Yet, in his book FALLOUT: THE ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE WORLD TRADE CENTRE COLLAPSE, Juan Gonzalez described clearly, back in 2002, the horrific reality of the various carcinogenic chemicals and dangerous heavy metals released in vast quantities in the air and water, polluting office blocks and people's homes. These pollutants included dioxins, mercury, lead, PCBs, asbestos, benzene, and many other nasties.

He documented how Mayor Giuliani and Environmental Protection Agency officials downplayed the risks: e.g. "*Contaminants are either not detectable or below the Agency's concern levels*." He described the lack of professional clean-up operations to ensure people's homes and workplaces were made properly safe. Residents were merely advised to vacuum their dust-laden curtains and carpets, and wipe hard surfaces with a damp cloth. Landlords opted for the cheapest option - 2 or 3 immigrant labourers armed with ordinary vacuum cleaners.

Only now, five years after FALLOUT was published (by The New Press, a not-for-profit independent publisher); only after deaths have been officially attributed to these environmental effects; with many victims incapacitated; with lawsuits pending; and with victims demonstrating in Washington: only now have we had some brief reports about this (e.g. BBC RADIO 4 NEWS and CHANNEL 4 NEWS, 24-25 June 2007). Five years seems a long time to wait for such information.

It seems as if the only victims that mattered to the mass media and US officialdom were those who were killed on the day - those workers whose televised deaths could be used to whip up "*patriotic*" support for a war. As to the others, rescuers and residents? Expendable, forgettable, mere 'collateral damage'.

[Back to top](#)

The Failure of Politicians

When Tony Blair became Prime Minister, he made his first major speech in office at the poverty-stricken Aylesbury Estate, near the Elephant and Castle, a rundown area in South London. "*I want there to be no 'no hope' areas in the new Britain*", he declared on that occasion, as he promised vast improvements in the lives of the 7,500 "forgotten people" who lived there (*Three-Minute Wonder: Blair's Children*, CHANNEL 4, 27 June 2007).

That promise was hollow. The problems on the Estate got worse as the capitalist class got richer. That is Blair's legacy - the working class remain an exploited working class living in poverty and social alienation while the rich bask in wealth and privilege.

Now, today, after ten years of Labour in power with whopping big majorities, it is hard to find a single problem of the working class which has been solved by this 'Labour' government.

Before 1945, the only Labour governments had been very short-term, and lacked enough of a majority in Parliament to carry their policies through. They were, it was said, "*in office but not in power*". At least, that was their excuse.

But the 1945 government headed by Attlee had tremendous, if badly mistaken, popular support, a clear set of policies, and a strong majority in Parliament. Even so, after only a few short years, it was seen to be a failure, and by 1951 Attlee and his gang were out of government. Labour lost in each of the next two general elections: in this cyclical beauty contest the voters - mostly working class - regularly preferred the Tories. So it was many a long year, "*13 wasted years*," before Wilson kissed the Queen's hand and moved into no. 10 in 1964, with 48 per cent of the vote. After Heath's confrontation with the miners in 1974, Labour were back in power again, to be followed in 1979 by the Thatcher decade and then by Major, another long spell of Tory government.

We mentioned a cyclical beauty contest: no government can expect to last for very long - sooner or later it loses any shred of popular support, hence any sort of 'democratic' legitimacy. But, if only to prevent riots on the streets, it is useful for the capitalist class to be able to offer the workers an electoral choice, even if that is only a sham choice, a 'choice' between Tweedledum and Tweedledee.

Hence the emergence and persistence of the two-party system, of Whigs and Tories, later Liberals and Tories, and, since the 1920s, Labourites and Tories.

Basically it amounts to a system where you have two teams of politicians claiming to be able to run things. When one lot of housekeepers gets to be too unpopular, too corrupt, too incompetent, too dishonest and untrustworthy, this alternating system allows for the other lot to be put in. As Enoch Powell wrote:
All political lives, unless they are cut off in midstream at a happy juncture, end in failure, because that is the nature of politics and of human affairs.

Recently the news has been full of criticism of Blair's government, which is widely seen as dishonest and corrupt. Not exactly like the Major government, with their cash-for-questions scandal: this is worse - now it is croneyism, favours to billionaires, and illegal cash or loans for peerages. The pages of PRIVATE EYE are full of this sort of stuff.

Blair, who entered Downing Street proclaiming his intention to be purer than pure, has left with a cloud hanging over him, with the police and Crown Prosecution Service investigations into the cash-for-honours scandal.. He is the only B *He had sufficient conscience to bother him, but not sufficient to keep him straight* British Prime Minister, so far, to have been questioned by the police, while in office - as a suspect. As Lloyd George said of Ramsay MacDonald:
.

In short, Blair as a Prime Minister did much the same as many of his predecessors. Scandal and disgrace are normal with a government nearing the end of its usefulness to British capitalism. For us - as Socialists - it's not something we should waste too much time on.

The Blair-Brown government is also widely seen to be incompetent: it has been pouring money into education and the National Health Service, yet there is precious little to show for this. That too is not a huge matter for us to concern ourselves about as Socialists .

The people who get really steamed up about this sort of thing are those, like the editors of the TIMES and the ECONOMIST, who want to see a British government being efficient with its use of "*taxpayers' money*". Paradoxically they want to see a reduction in the rate of unemployment, with a reduced amount of taxation being spent on 'welfare' and 'benefits'. But their calls for greater efficiency in running businesses and government services usually result on workers being laid off, as 'redundant' - hence there is more unemployment, not less. Such are some of the contradictions of modern capitalism.

This government is also seen now to be untrustworthy - its politicians apparently incapable of giving a straight answer to a question and often seen to be blatantly lying.

As the ECONOMIST (9 June 2007) put it:
[These] worries have been sharpened by widespread doubts (graver than normal) in government's ability to do anything at all, even to tell the truth.

That too is not unusual, after a party has been in power for a while. But when cynicism becomes widespread, such a government loses its authority, and hence loses its ability to govern, and this is the point at which the powerful media barons will be likely to pull the rug out from any government. All governments are doomed to end in failure - that is their fate.

That of course is the fate of every government trying to run capitalism: the capitalist system throws up problems galore, all the time. At some point, the penny drops, and it becomes clear that this crowd are no good at government, they have not got the answers, and it's time for a change. The removal vans arrive in Downing Street, and the Queen appoints a new Prime Minister.

The modern Labour Party is the natural heir to the old Whig party, both alike being characterised primarily for being opposed to the Tories. In his time, Marx had this to say of the Whigs:

It is evident what a distastefully heterogeneous mixture the character of the British Whigs must turn out to be: Feudalists, who are at the same time Malthusians, money-mongers with feudal prejudices, aristocrats without point of honour, Bourgeois without industrial activity, finality-men with progressive phrases, progressists with fanatical Conservatism, traffickers in homeopathical fractions of reforms, fosterers of family-nepotism, Grand Masters of corruption, hypocrites of religion, Tartuffes of politics.

DISPACHES FOR THE NEW YORK TRIBUNE, 21 August 1852, Penguin, p103

We can apply these comments to Blair and Brown, and the 'New' Labour government. How else to explain Blair's enthusiasm for people with vast wealth; for having holidays in an Italian palazzo; his hypocrisy in matters of religion - seeking admission to the reactionary Vatican Church (the current Pope was the man who organised a very effective cover-up when scandals were likely to erupt about Catholic priests sexually abusing children), with its hostility to birth control and homosexuality, while he claims to stand for equal rights for women and gay; and his supposed Christianity ("*Thou shalt not kill*" and "*Love thy neighbour as thyself*"), which sits ill with his enthusiasm for nuclear weapons and wars.

What of 'New' Labour's claims to be a progressive, reforming government? Yet they stuck with Thatcher's anti-trade union laws and the Tory programme of privatisation, along with cuts in spending on health services, leading to the closing of many hospitals.

As for reforms, Marx's shrewd comment about trafficking in "*homeopathical fractions of reforms*" is very apt.. As a reforming government, this one has been quite exceptionally timid, afraid of the slightest adverse comments by their paymasters in Big Business. Possibly the most telling facts, indicating in whose interests this government really operates, have to do with the statistics on how well the undeserving rich have benefited from Labour's benign regime, e.g.

Big rise in high earners

The ranks of Britain's highest earners, most of them based in London and the South-East, have swelled by nearly 60 per cent in just four years... The number of people who declare a taxable income of £500,000 or more has risen from 19,000 in 2003-2004 to 30,000 in 2006-2007, according to HM Revenue and Customs [part of the Treasury, Brown's department]. The incomes of the top 1 per cent of earners have more than doubled since 1990... ,while average earnings have increased by just 54 per cent.

THE INDEPENDENT, 23 June 2007

Under this 'Labour' government, special arrangements have been made to allow businesses and 'non-domiciled' foreign billionaires to pay little or no tax.

The UK plays a major role in helping companies dodge the tax they owe. Many of the world's tax havens are British, whether overseas territories such as the Cayman Islands, Bermuda and British Virgin Islands or Crown Dependencies such as Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man. The City of London acts as the nerve centre for these tax havens and supports an army of pin-striped lawyers and accountants devoted to helping companies dodge tax.

War on Want leaflet

Somewhat pathetically, War on Want ask readers of that leaflet to post their protests to the very man who has presided over UK economic and tax policies for the last ten years, and who is now our 'new' Prime Minister, the Right

Honourable Gordon Brown. But, even if every man, woman and child in the country sent in cards of protest, we doubt if Brown's policies would be changed. This, after all, is the same man who, before 'New' Labour won the 1997 election, had spent years schmoozing with City financiers, wining and dining on the 'prawn cocktail circuit', reassuring them all that a 'New' Labour government's policies would not damage their so important interests.

Labour, after all, is a governing party which prefers to receive its funding, whether as donations or loans, from multimillionaires and businessmen, as the United States politicians do, rather than be "*in hock*" to the trade unions. And among Brown's appointments to government posts is Sir Digby Jones, the former head of the CBI, the bosses' union - not someone from the trade union world.

Labour, operating as the alternative party to 'reform' British capitalism, inevitably fails. But that has nothing to do with the interests of the working class. Our concern is to end this system of class exploitation, one which is the cause of all forms of poverty and debt, as well as wars and famine.

DISCLAIMER: A POLITICAL HEALTH WARNING

The SPGB is produced by a group of Socialists, many of whom were expelled from the Clapham-based Socialist Party in May 1991 for using the name "*The Socialist Party of Great Britain*" in political propaganda, as required by Clause 8 of the S P G B's OBJECT AND DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES.

Camden and North West London Branches reconstituted The Socialist Party of Great Britain in June 1991 around the 1904 Object and Declaration of Principles. Money given to us is on the understanding that we are **NOT** the Socialist Party at 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN, to whom we are politically opposed as an anti-Socialist organisation which, for the best part of 15 years, has tried to disrupt our Socialist activity.

We politically oppose the Clapham-based Socialist Party as we do all other political parties, "*whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist*" (Clause 8 of THE DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES).

[Back to top](#)

Object and Declaration of Principles

Object

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

Declaration of Principles

THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN HOLDS:

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (ie land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.
2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle, between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.
3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and

their democratic control by the whole people.

4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind without distinction of race or sex.
5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.
6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organise consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.
7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.
8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.

[Back to top](#)

email: enquiries@socialiststudies.org.uk | www.socialiststudies.org.uk